

John 6

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[0 : 00] I'd like us to turn back to the passage we read in the Gospel of John, chapter 6, and look at one of the final verses of that chapter on page 1071.

The words of Jesus in verse 67, You do not want to leave too, do you? Or as it's sometimes translated in you, will you also go away?

In this chapter we read how Jesus attracted a great deal of popularity through the miracle of the loaves and the fishes.

And the people in fact sought to make him king, such was his popularity. They wanted him to become their revolutionary leader, to lead a rebellion against the Roman Empire and set the nation of Israel free.

That was not the mission of Jesus, so Jesus withdrew and the people sought him the next day. And in the conversation between Jesus and the people that followed, we see how gradually the number of disciples diminished.

[1 : 31] You can almost see the number of disciples diminishing as we read through this chapter. And in some ways this chapter is a chapter which is relevant for us in our situation today, because especially in this country and throughout Western Europe where church membership and church attendance is diminishing.

That is not true in many parts of the world and we give God thanks for that. We thank God that today there are more Christians than at any other time in history. But nevertheless the situation that confronts us is that in these nations here in Western Europe, there are fewer Christians than there have been for several generations.

Christians. And what one commentator in this gospel describes as the crisis in Galilee is reflected in the crisis that we face in our churches in Western Europe.

And I think there are lessons for us in this chapter here, because as I say the context is remarkably similar. Now I'd like us to focus this morning upon the questions that the people bring to Jesus.

They bring a whole series of questions and I'd like us to look particularly at four. First question in verse 25. It's a simple question apparently on the surface.

[2 : 59] Rabbi, they say, when did you get here? Now following on from that question, there's a whole series of other questions.

We have the second question in verse 42. Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

How can he now say, I came down from heaven? How can this person, who is simply a human being, say that he came down from heaven?

The third question in verse 52, where the Jews, we read, began to argue sharply among themselves, how can this man give us his flesh to eat?

How can he give us his flesh to eat? And the final question I would like to draw your attention to this morning is in verse 60, where the people come and say, this is a hard teaching.

[4 : 04] Who can accept it? So let's take a closer look at each of these questions and see their relevance for us in our situation today.

First of all, in verse 25, when did you come here? Now as we look at the chapter, we discover that in fact the disciples were asking the wrong question.

We asked Jesus, when did he get there? There was a question which was irrelevant. The fact Jesus was there when he got there didn't really matter.

And Jesus in his reply does not answer the question directly. Rather he goes to the heart of the problem. I tell you the truth, he says, you're looking for me not because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

The people were concerned about Jesus being there because they wanted to make him king. They had wanted to make him king. And he had gone elsewhere. And they were disappointed.

[5 : 22] They were still focused on seeing him as a political saviour, as a political messiah. And throughout John's Gospel we discover that Jesus is conscious of following God's plan.

Because again and again John tells us his hour or his time had not yet come. And what had happened was that the timetable that the people had, these people who, many of whom at that stage were disciples in the verse of commas, their timetable was different from the timetable of Jesus.

They were going by the clock, if you like, while Jesus was going by God's time. And God's time is not measured in hours and minutes.

God's time is measured in quality rather than in quantity. It's interesting that in the New Testament there are two words that are translated time. Two words in the Greek language.

One is *chronos*, from which we get the word *chronometer*, from which we get all our watches which are *chronometers*. They tell us the time.

[6 : 37] The other word is the word *kairos*, which really means opportunity. And we may say, what is the time? The time is now 1144 or 1143.

That we might say, what is it time for the church to do? Ought we go out to evangelize?

We use the word in that sense of opportunity. And *kairos* is used for that. And Jesus lived his life in terms, not of the clock, not of the *chronos*, but of the opportunities that he saw in fulfilling the will that God his Father had for him.

Popular acclaim from Jesus was not enough. He required to know what his Father's will was. And that was what motivated him.

That was the governing principle of his life. And so we find the people here asking the wrong question. They're asking, what is the time? They're asking, looking at their watches.

[7 : 49] And Jesus is saying, this is not the time he's going by. It's a different time scale. Not just a different time zone, a different time scale. Jesus is saying, his time scale, his time scale is governed by the kingdom of God, by doing the will of God.

And that's the question we need to ask. And so often in the church today, we ask questions which really are limited to time and space. Now, it's right that we should ask these questions, but we need to also ask questions about what is God's purpose?

What is God doing in the world? God has not given up in the world. The world is in God's hands. The kingdom of God is coming. Often we don't see it.

Often we can't see it. That it's there and we're asked to believe it. Faith is looking to him who is invisible. And these are the questions we need to ask.

What is God doing today? Can we discern the hand of God in the times around us? So we need to ask, not so much, what is the time, but what are the times?

[8 : 59] How do they relate to the kingdom of God? But then in the second question, where they come in verse 42, and they say, how can this man who is the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know, how can he say, I came down from heaven?

We read here that the people began to grumble. The people began to complain. The people began to murmur. The word that John uses here is the word which was used of the people in the wilderness, in the desert, in the Old Testament, grumbling.

After they came out of Egypt because there was no food in the desert. And it was in response to their grumbling that God gave them manna. And in fact, the miracle that God gave through Moses in the manna, prompted many of the Jews in Jesus' time to believe that when the Messiah would come, he would provide manna from heaven, just as Moses had done.

And that's why I think we have this frequent mention of manna in the dialogue that we have here in this passage. Now what Jesus in fact says to the people here is that they did not recognize the sign. They did not see the significance of the sign which he had wrought in multiplying the loaves and the fishes. And so not only did the people ask the wrong question, but they missed the big picture.

[10 : 40] They judged purely by superficial standards. They saw only the tip of the iceberg. They failed to see what God was doing in the world.

As one commentator says, instead of seeing in the bread the sign, in the sign they saw only the bread. And Jesus here speaks about what the people see.

And the word see, we're told in the Greek language, is a more reflective word than it is in English. And Jesus encouraging the people not simply to see the outside, the exterior, but to see what is beyond that, to see the deeper significance, to see beyond his humanity, to see his calling as Messiah, to see his unique personhood as the Son of God.

And that's why John wrote his Gospel, that people might believe that Jesus is the Christ, that Jesus is the one whom God had promised centuries before, who would come to save the world.

And that's what the people had missed. They thought that he would be a political leader, or a military leader. They failed to realize that Jesus had come to be a spiritual leader, and a moral leader, to be a leader of a different kind, to introduce a kingdom of a different kind.

[12 : 19] And so I think it's a challenge to all of us here to think not only in terms of time, and the distinction between time and times, but also to be able to discern the times.

We read in the Old Testament that the men of Issachar were able to discern the times, and to know what Israel should do. And that's what the people here with Jesus were failing to do.

That's what we in the Church of God today are being challenged to do, to discern the times, to see what God is doing in the world. God is, as we've said already, God is at work.

And God has given us his word to, as Calvin said, to be spectacles, to help us to see the world as he sees it. And when we look out in the world today, and when we see what's happening, whether we're watching the news on television, or reading the newspaper, then let us put on these spectacles that God has given to us.

Let's ask him for the spirit of discernment that he's given us in his word, to help us to see what he is doing, and to have a spirit of discernment.

[13 : 33] And then we will know what the Church of God should do. We'll know what we should do in that situation, rather than being buffeted by the strongest, the most recent argument that we've heard.

To look at things through the lens of Holy Scripture which God has given to us. The Bible is a book for practical living. It is not an esoteric text.

It is not a text for scholars. It's a text for ordinary people. It's the book of the people. God has given it to us to live our lives out of.

Then we come to the next question which we find in verse 52. How can this man give us his flesh to eat?

Asks Jesus. How can this, as the people, how can this man give us his flesh to eat? At this particular point of time we notice that not only were the people grumbling but they had begun to argue.

[14 : 45] They began to dispute among themselves. They began to argue sharply as the NIV puts it. and I understand the Greek here signifies that they argued loudly.

They were shouting at each other. They were no longer asking Jesus questions. They began to fight and to argue with each other.

An angry argument started among them. Up to this point they were asking questions and making responses together. But here their solidarity breaks down and each one becomes concerned to make his or her individual point.

And so we have what was a dialogue of where Jesus was teaching the people really becoming a kind of rabble. They were no longer willing to listen.

After that point they were at least willing to listen to Jesus. Jesus. But now they were no longer willing to listen. And so they were losing the key aptitude of a disciple which is to hear.

[15 : 59] They began to talk to themselves to listen to each other rather than to listen to Jesus. Faith comes by hearing says the Apostle Paul.

Take heed how you hear says Jesus because this is the key aptitude. If you want to be a disciple of Jesus you need to listen, you need to hear. And here we find sadly, tragically, the people losing this key aptitude of the ability to listen and to hear.

And they begin to listen to each other rather than to listen to Jesus. We live in a world of many conflicting voices, many opinions.

And many of these opinions are contradict God's word and God's values. And in this situation we are being challenged to listen to Jesus, to hear his word, and to give his word a higher place than any other word, to recognize that his word is more than an opinion, that it is the word of God, that he has given it to us for his guidance, as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path.

And it's easy for us to listen to people arguing on different sides, just as the disciples began to argue here, and for us to be swayed one way or another.

[17 : 25] But the key, if you want to be a disciple of Jesus, to listen to him. Faith comes by hearing. Hearing by the word of God, and the phrase there in the Greek is the spoken word of God, it's the word of God that is witnessed to, that is proclaimed, through which people come to faith.

So, hearing is so important. And so, we find that these erstwhile disciples, they asked the wrong question, they missed the big picture, but they also lost this key aptitude. They lost the key aptitude of hearing, listening to Jesus. And I would urge all of you to covet that aptitude of just listening.

It's so easy to switch off even in church. It's so easy to dream of the sports field, to dream of a film that you've seen recently, or a book that you've read. I would urge you to listen, because that's how you come to faith.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the spoken word of God. Then there's the final question in verse 60.

[18 : 45] This is a hard saying. They said, who can accept it? Who can accept it? This teaching, this saying, was hard.

It was too hard for these listeners to Jesus. It was hard not to understand, so much as hard to accept.

Because accepting this would mean obedience. It would mean doing the will of God. Remember when the people came to Jesus and said, what is the work of God that we should do?

And Jesus said, it is to believe. And believing is something active. It's something that issues in obedience. It's not simply nodding assent.

It's not simply ticking the yes box in the questionnaire. It's making a commitment to follow the Lord Jesus Christ. It means action.

[19 : 51] that's why the verb follow is used in the Gospels. The disciples of Jesus were his followers.

They were people who simply didn't say they thought Jesus was a great person. They followed him. They committed their lives to him. And when Jesus speaks about coming, he's speaking about action.

We come to Jesus and we follow him. And so at the end of this dialogue, so many of these people failed the acid test.

They were not willing to make that commitment. I'm sure you've heard the well-known story of the French tightrope walker Blondin, way back I think in the late 19th century, early 20th century, who stretched his tightrope across the Niagara Falls in Canada.

And he had a wheelbarrow without a tire, so he could wheel the barrow across this tightrope. And he drew thousands of people to see this amazing spectacle, this man risking his life.

[21 : 13] And as the people were watching him one day, two men were arguing. one was saying, Blondin's going to die, he's going to plunge to his death. And the other was saying, no, no, no, he's done it before, he can do it again.

And he was convinced that Blondin could do it. And then Blondin happened to pass by and he heard these men and he went up to them and he said to the one who was saying, yes, you could do it, he said, do you really believe I could do it?

Sure, he said, I believe you could do it. That's fine, said Blondin, if you believe I can do it, come with me and jump into my barrow and let me hold your cross.

The man said, no, no. You take the box, yes, but no commitment. And that's the kind of commitment Jesus is asking of you and of me, a total commitment to give your life and soul to him. to serve him now and forever. To put him first in the midst of all the conflicting priorities of life and to make him, to see him as we read in the prologue to this gospel, John's gospel, as the one and only, the one who is Lord, the one who is supreme, the one who is Lord of all.

[22 : 43] So I wonder whether we today fail this acid test. Because this is the question that Jesus is asking us, will we follow him?

Will we commit our lives to him? Are we prepared to nail his colors to our man? Are we prepared to go with him and acknowledge him as our Lord and Savior?

That's the challenge that he brought to these disciples. And so many of them went back and walked no more with him. And then Jesus came to the twelve and said, will you also go away?

And Peter on their behalf said, Lord, to whom can we go? No one else. That's the words of eternal life. God grant that all of us may make that commitment today.

That we may commit our lives and put our soul in the hands of Jesus and trust him to carry us into the unknown future and into a timeless eternity.

[24 : 23] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.